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ABSTRACT

A study extended and elaborated the coorientation model as a basis for reinterpreting Steven H. Chaffee and Jack M. McLeod's (1970) construct of family communication patterns. Melvin L. Kohn's (1977) theory of the influence of life experiences (e.g., conditions of employment) on parenting values argues that socio-orientation might better be interpreted as a measure of norms promoting conformity, and concept-orientation as a measure of norms promoting independence and intellectual autonomy. Jeanne Meadowcroft's (1986) finding that socio-orientation decreases with the age of the child supports the conformity/autonomy interpretation, and contradicts the traditional harmony/confrontation interpretation of family communication patterns. The conformity/autonomy interpretation also provides a theoretically sound basis for integrating the results of previous family communication patterns research. (Twenty-two references and two appendixes containing Family Communication Pattern items and information flow measures are attached.) (Author/RAE)

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FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND THE FLOW OF INFORMATION IN THE FAMILY

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Abstract

The coorientation model is extended and elaborated as a basis for re-interpreting Chaffee and McLeod's (1970) construct of family communication patterns. In accordance with Kohn's (1977) theory of the influence of life experiences (e.g., conditions of employment) on parenting values it is argued that socio-orientation might better be interpreted as a measure of norms promoting conformity, and concept-orientation as a measure of norms promoting independence and intellectual autonomy. Meadowcroft's (1986) finding that socio-orientation decreases with the age of the child supports the conformity / autonomy interpretation, and contradicts the traditional harmony / confrontation interpretation of family communication patterns. The conformity / autonomy interpretation also provides a theoretically sound basis for integrating the results of previous family communication patterns research.

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FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND THE FLOW OF INFORMATION IN THE FAMILY

INTRODUCTION

Gecas (1981) identifies two views of socialization, based on quite different assumptions about the relationship of individual to society, and leading to quite different implications for the socialization process. One point of view stresses adaptation and conformity; the other emphasizes the individual's development into a self-assertive, autonomous human being. Kohn (1977) makes a similar distinction between parental values favoring conformity and parental values favoring autonomy and self-direction.

The conformity / autonomy distinction has important implications for communication theory, and in particular for the study of family socialization norms. Conformity implies a closed communication environment with one-way flow of information: the parent or other authority figure tells the child what to believe and how to view the world, and the child accepts the parents' views without question or argument. Autonomy and self-direction, on the other hand, implies an open communication environment with two-way information flow, in which the child is encouraged to develop and express his or her own views, to question the views of other people, and to arrive at an understanding of the world through discussion and reasoning.

In this paper I will argue that the Family Communication Pattern (FCP) instrument (Chaffee and McLeod, 1970; Chaffee et al., 1966; McLeod and Chaffee, 1972) can be fruitfully interpreted as a measure of the family's orientation

toward either conformity or autonomy. Concept-orientation measures family norms favoring an open flow of information and the child's development as an autonomous individual; socio-orientation measures family norms favoring a restricted or distorted flow of information and the child's conformity to the parent's beliefs and values.

I will begin by reviewing the theoretical basis of the FCP construct in the coorientation model, and discuss the basic dimensions of parent-child coorientation in terms of conformity vs. autonomy. I will then review the epistemic linkages between the content of the items in the FCP instrument and these two basic coorientation dimensions. Although this elaborated theoretical basis does not radically change the interpretation of the FCP scales, it does lead to a different set of predictions concerning the implications of the two FCP dimensions for the emotional climate in the family, and for the communication socialization of the young adolescent. In particular, it would appear that concept-orientation, rather than socio-orientation, is more conducive to a climate of harmony in the family. Similarly, concept-orientation, rather than socio-orientation, would seem to require more sophisticated intellectual and social skills (such as perspective-taking).

I will test these alternative interpretations of the FCP instrument by re-examining some research findings presented by Meadowcroft (1986), and show how the proposed change in the interpretation of family communication patterns explains some otherwise anomolous results. Finally, I will show how the conformity / autonomy view of Family Communication Patterns can lead to a coherent theoretical synthesis of the findings of past FCP-based research.

COORIENTATION AND FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

Chaffee and McLeod's construct of Family Communication Patterns developed in parallel with their analysis of communication as a process of coorientation, or mutually orienting toward some object or concept. From the authors' comments (in McLeod, Chaffee, and Wackman, 1966 and elsewhere) it appears that the original instrument was developed as part of a larger study of political socialization, with the intention of measuring the role or exercise of parental power in the socialization process. Rather than a single, unified dimension, however, they encountered two apparently orthogonal dimensions — which they interpreted in accordance with Newcomb's (1953) coorientation model.

Early in the process of developing the FCP construct, Chaffee and McLeod developed a more elaborated version of the coorientation model, shifting their emphasis from the mutuality of affective valence to the match between cognitions. It is worth retracing this developmental history of the FCP construct, because the conventional interpretation of FCP carries elements based on both versions of the coorientation model. This accretion of interpretations is partly responsible for some of the contradictions and inconsistencies that have crept into the FCP literature (see Tims and Masland, 1985, for a detailed methodological analysis.)

Coorientation as Cognitive Balance

Newcomb (1953) argued that communication transactions could be described in terms of three elements, "two persons, A and B, and an object or concept X toward which they are mutually oriented." The relevant cognitive components of this system are A's orientation toward (or cognitions about) X and B, which we may represent as A:X and A:B, respectively, and B's orientations toward X and A, which we represent as B:X and B:A (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

The Basic A-B-X Coorientation Model

(based on Newcomb, 1953)

Newcomb's model was motivated by the idea of cognitive balance; that is, by the expectation that individuals would be intolerant of an unbalanced A-B-X system, and would seek to correct the imbalance through communication. For example, if A:B and A:X are both positive (A likes both B and X) but B:X is negative (B dislikes X), person A will be motivated to change her own cognitions about X, to change her own cognitions about B, or to attempt to change B's cognitions through communication. It turns out that human beings are somewhat less constrained by considerations of logical consistency than Newcomb expected, and the predictions of balance theory hold only for certain limited conditions (see Newcomb, 1978, for a review and discussion).

Family Communication Patterns as Cognitive Balance

The original study of Family Communication Patterns (Chaffee, McLeod, and Wackman, 1966) used ten questions to measure communication patterns; several additional questions have been introduced in various subsequent studies, in combination with subsets of the original ten. (Appendix A lists fourteen of the most frequently-appearing questions, selected on the basis of having

appeared in more than one major study.) Although Chaffee and McLeod had originally intended the ten items as a measure of the single concept of parental power, factor-analysis of responses to the ten items yielded two independent factors, which were interpreted according to Newcomb's A-B-X model as indices of how cognitive imbalances are resolved. (A cognitive imbalance exists, for example, if the Child:Parent valence is assumed to be positive, but the child believes X to be true or likes X and the parent believes X to be false or dislikes X — that is, the Child:Idea valence does not match the Parent:Idea valence.)

The first factor suggested that cognitive imbalances will be resolved in favor of the A:B (Child:Parent) valence, that is, by changing the A:X valence, and was accordingly labelled 'socio-orientation'. In the socio-oriented family, "the child is encouraged to maintain harmonious personal relationships with his parents and others. Thus, he may be advised to give in on arguments, avoid controversy, repress anger, and generally keep away from trouble" (Chaffee *et al.*, 1966). The second factor suggested that cognitive imbalances will be resolved in favor of the A:X (e.g., Child:Idea) valence, that is, by changing the valence of the A:B relationship, and was labelled 'concept-orientation'. In the concept-oriented family, "the developing child is stimulated to express his ideas, give reasons for them, and challenge others' beliefs."

Since Newcomb's model was based on the premise of A's simultaneous orientation toward B and X and the two scales seemed to be uncorrelated, the underlying dimensions were posited as conceptually independent. By splitting the sample along the median on each scale, four types of families could be identified: 'Laissez-faire', low on both dimensions; 'protective', low on

concept but high on socio-orientation; 'pluralistic', low on socio but high on concept-orientation; and 'consensual', high on both.

The 'protective' and 'pluralistic' families are "pure types". In the first case, an affective imbalance (I like Dad and I like Jesse Jackson but Dad dislikes Jesse Jackson) will always be resolved by changing the A:X valence (If Dad doesn't like Jesse Jackson neither do I). In the second case, an affective imbalance will always be resolved by changing the A:B valence (if Dad doesn't like Jesse then Dad's simply wrong). In the laissez-faire family, neither valence is regarded as having any particular importance. In the consensual family, both valences are regarded as important: (Dad is important to me and so is Jesse Jackson.) Logically, a sustained commitment to both the A:X and A:B valences can be achieved in only two ways: Dad can be convinced to change *his* valence (through communication), or I can accept the cognitive inconsistency. (Note that the two dimensions can not logically be strictly independent, even within Newcomb's version of the model.)

Newcomb's original idea was that such a situation of imbalance would lead to more communication, in the form of persuasion attempts (Newcomb, 1953). However, subsequent research has shown that individuals often prefer to accept imbalance as a requisite for maintaining positive valences rather than changing a positive valence to negative in order to restore balance (Newcomb, 1978). Accordingly, we would expect that the "consensual" family would either arrive at a consensus through discussion and compromise or "agree to disagree."

Introducing the perspective of the Other into Coorientation

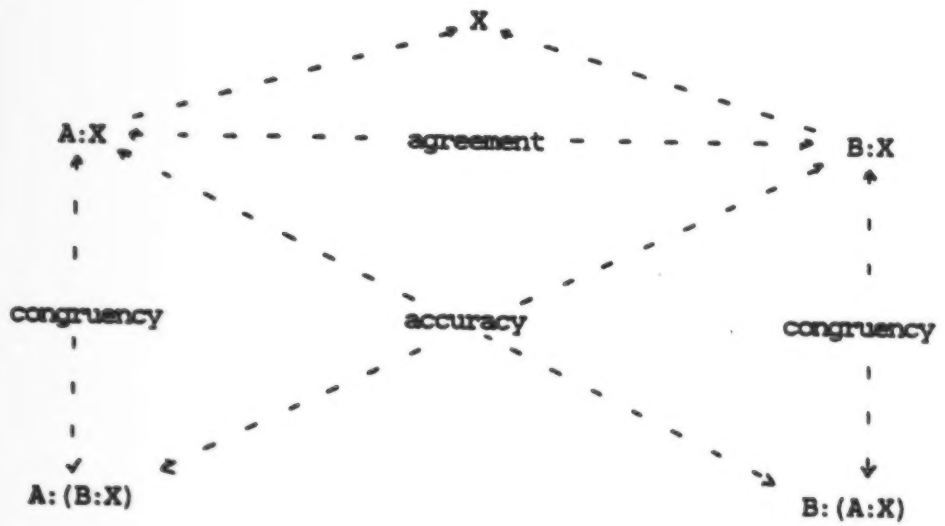
Although their early work was strongly influenced by Newcomb's cognitive balance approach to coorientation, Chaffee and McLeod soon shifted their attention from the question of how cognitive imbalances might motivate

communication, toward the question of how the content of communication can affect the content of cognitions. Consistent with Mead's (1934) view of the communication relationship, they argued that each person, A and B, must have some cognitions about the other person's orientations toward X. For example, in addition to her own cognitions, A:X, person A also has some impression of what person B thinks about X, which we may represent as A:(B:X). Conversely, we may represent B's perceptions of A's cognitions as B:(A:X). Except in the special case wherein the topic of conversation concerns their relationship, the two person's orientations toward each other, A:B and B:A, drop out of the model (see Ritchie, 1987, for an extended discussion of notation).

Figure 2

The Coorientation Model

(Based on McLeod and Chaffee, 1972)



Chaffee and McLeod identified three distinct comparisons within the coorientation system (Figure 2). Agreement exists when A:X = B:X (A's and B's

thoughts about the topic match). Congruency, or the perception of agreement, exists when A:(B:X) = A:X, that is, when A perceives that B's thoughts match her own, and conversely when B:(A:X) = B:X. Accuracy exists when A:(B:X) = B:X, that is, when A's perception of B's thoughts match what B actually thinks, and conversely when B:(A:X) = A:X. Agreement and accuracy are defined as social-level comparisons, accessible only to an observer standing outside the system. Congruency or perceived agreement is a cognitive-level comparison, accessible only to each person within the system.

A free flow of information between A and B (A tells B what she thinks about X, and B tells A what he thinks about X) will tend to increase the accuracy of both. This is true regardless of whether the two agree or disagree. However, a free flow of information will increase congruency, or the perception of agreement, only in the case that (1) the two agree, and (2) they have a false perception of disagreement. If the two agree and correctly perceive their agreement, information will have no effect on congruency. If they disagree, information will reduce congruency.

Accuracy and congruency can only coexist in the system if there is agreement, since accuracy would make any disagreement known, thereby reducing the perception of agreement (congruency). Thus, in the general case (when agreement cannot be assumed) an individual might reasonably expect that increasing the other person's accuracy (as by providing accurate information) will decrease the other person's congruency, and conversely, the other person's congruency can best be increased by blocking or distorting information so as to decrease the other person's accuracy.

Thus restated, the coorientation model provides a parsimonious description of the logic underlying the informational component of communication between

any two persons. As it turns out, the actual measurement of accuracy is trickier than it seems (Cronbach, 1955). However, the model can be used for analyzing the logic of a communicative interaction without actually measuring the outcome.

Newcomb's version of the coorientation model implicitly assumes that agreement is the objective and outcome of any communication event. However, Chaffee and McLeod (1970) pointed out that agreement is not necessarily a good measure of communication effectiveness. A free flow of information regarding X from person A to person B can directly affect B:(A:X) but not B:X. E.g., if I freely communicate with Dad about Jesse Jackson, the flow of information between us will affect Dad's perception of what I probably believe about Jesse Jackson, but will not necessarily change his own views. Whether B takes the further step of changing his own cognitions, B:X, to match his perception of A's cognitions may depend on many factors independent of the communication act itself (for example, on the strength of B's beliefs about X, his views as to A's qualifications to pass judgment on X, and so forth). Agreement may or may not occur, and may not even be desired.

When communication is defined as an informative process, the best measure of effective communication is accuracy, not agreement. Chaffee and McLeod proposed their coorientation model as a tool for diagnosing communication problems, by detecting instances in which communication leads to increased congruency rather than to increased accuracy. The task of the communication researcher is to examine the structural barriers or constraints inhibiting perfect communication (the free flow of accurate information), and coorientation provides a useful model for measuring and diagnosing those constraints.

The reformulation of coorientation as a diagnostic model suggested quite a different interpretation of the FCP measure. Family Communication Patterns could now be viewed as a measurement of constraints operating within the family either to promote or inhibit the flow of accurate information between family members, that is, as constraints favoring either accuracy or congruency (McLeod and Chaffee, 1972).

Family Communication Patterns as a Measure of Constraints on Information Flow

As Chaffee and McLeod shifted toward a more elaborate model of coorientation, based on informational outcomes rather than orientational valences, they also shifted their thinking about the two dimensions. Socio-orientation was now identified with behaviors that promote congruency (e.g., by inhibiting accuracy), and concept-orientation with behaviors that promote accuracy (McLeod and Chaffee, 1973). Because accuracy and congruency can only coexist in a situation of agreement, the scales should logically be negatively correlated. A family that scores high on both scales ('consensual') is making contradictory demands of the child: "be honest about your feelings and express your ideas openly," but "don't argue or disagree with others" (McLeod and Chaffee, 1972). Nevertheless, the idea that the two scales measure conceptually independent dimensions has persisted in the literature.

Introducing Individual Perspectives into the Coorientation Model

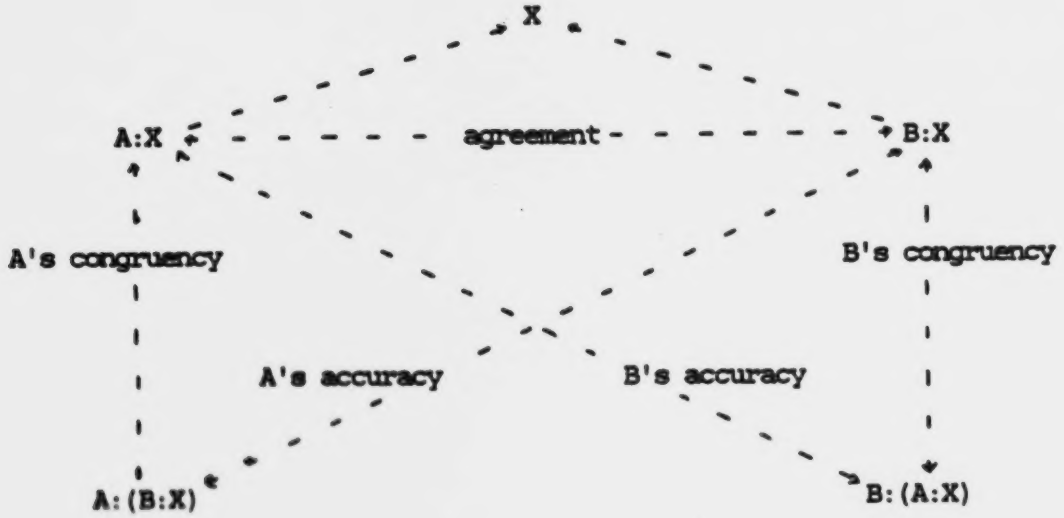
Ritchie (1987) argued that the logic of the coorientation model requires that the concepts of accuracy and congruency be separately specified for each of the two participants in any dyadic system (Figure 3). Each individual may have separate objectives for either her own or the other person's outcomes, and the objectives of the two individuals need not be compatible.

Either member of the dyad may promote the other's accuracy by making clear and unambiguous statements about her own ideas (a free flow of information). Conversely, either person may reduce the other person's accuracy by making false or ambiguous statements about her own ideas, or by saying nothing at all (obstructing the flow of information). Either person may promote her own accuracy by careful listening, and by comparing the other person's statements with previous statements and with other evidence (both of which increase the flow of information). A parent with an objective of her own accuracy may also counter her child's efforts to reduce her accuracy by actively seeking a flow of information, for example by threatening punishment for false, ambiguous, or evasive responses. In any case, an objective of either person's accuracy implies a free and unobstructed flow of information toward that person.

Figure 3

The Coorientation Model

(Based on Ritchie, 1987)



An objective of congruency has the opposite effect. If agreement is assumed to exist, any information flow would be superfluous. If there is any possibility that agreement does not exist, then any flow of accurate information in the direction of the congruency objective will increase accuracy and decrease congruency. Whether agreement exists or not, an objective of one person's congruency will imply a reduction or cessation of information flow toward that person. Only when one person believes that agreement exists and that the other person falsely perceives disagreement will a congruency objective imply increased information flow.

Thus in the general case objectives of congruency and accuracy for the same person are logically incompatible, and a system in which the parent has objectives for both her own accuracy and her own congruency is inherently unstable. However, there is no incompatibility between combinations such as parent's congruency with child's accuracy, both persons' accuracy, or both persons' congruency.

FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIALIZATION NORMS

Separating the parent's viewpoint from the child's viewpoint, and conceptualizing Family Communication Patterns as an expression of coorientation objectives leads to a subtle shift in interpretation. Although objectives of one's own congruency are incompatible with objectives of one's own accuracy, there is nothing to prevent a parent from having simultaneous objectives of the child's accuracy and his own congruency (or the reverse, for that matter). Thus, in interpreting the FCP scales as indices of norms favoring behavior concordant with accuracy or congruency, we need to ask *whose* accuracy and *whose* congruency (Ritchie, 1987); a similar argument leads to the question of *who* enjoys the harmony supposedly promoted by socio-orientation norms.

Family Communication Patterns and the Power Structure of the Family

Returning to the original conceptualization of Family Communication Patterns as somehow involving the parent's exercise of power (Chaffee *et al*, 1966), we can see that a parent might exercise power as a means of enforcing an objective of his own congruency. (Remember that from the parent's viewpoint, the parent's congruency means simply, "the parent's impression that the child agrees with him." If the parent desires that the child conform to his own views, this objective of agreement translates to an objective of his own congruency.) A parent who wishes that his child conform to his ideas might threaten punishment (or promise rewards) according to whether the child expresses agreement or not. The result is to make the child's outcomes contingent on the parent's congruency — and by implication to discourage a free flow of accurate information about the child's actual beliefs.

Concept-orientation can also be readily understood in terms of power. In the first place, concept-orientation promotes the child's autonomy, which can be expressed as the child's power over herself. In the second place, concept-orientation can be viewed as implying that the parent voluntarily restrains his own exercise of power, in the interest of promoting the child's autonomy (Ritchie, 1987). Thus, the two dimensions of socio-orientation and concept-orientation can be viewed as manifestations of two separate (but not independent) aspects of an underlying family power structure — an interpretation which is entirely consistent with Chaffee and McLeod's original conceptualization.

Socialization Norms and Coorientation Objectives

Gecas has distinguished two views of socialization: "One point of view stresses the individual's *adaptation* and conformity to societal requirements; the other emphasizes the individual's development into a self-assertive, distinct human being. Both of these perspectives and frames of references are valid and necessary for an adequate conception of socialization" (Gecas, 1981: 165-66, italics in original). Kohn (1977) has drawn a similar distinction between parental values favoring conformity, and parental values favoring autonomy and self-direction. Kohn has shown that parents who work with things, in routinized jobs with high supervision in which they are expected to follow orders tend to value conformity in their children. On the other hand, parents who work with people in complex jobs in which they are expected to make independent decisions with little supervision tend to value autonomy and self-direction in their children. Because the first type of working condition is more typical of lower-paying and lower-status jobs and the second type is more typical of higher-paying and higher-status jobs, the result is an observed correlation between social class and intellectual autonomy and flexibility.

The underlying theory is that parents generalize from their own life experiences (e.g., the conditions they experience in their own work), and attempt to inculcate in their children values and behaviors that will enable their children to get along well under similar conditions. If parents find that it is necessary to conform to the expectations of authority figures (or to the ideas prevailing among their social peers) they will encourage an attitude of conformity in their children. Conversely, if parents experience working conditions requiring sophisticated communication skills, the ability to think independently and engage in the free exchange of ideas, they will encourage an

attitude of independence and intellectual autonomy in their children. In both cases, the implicit objective is to prepare the child to adapt successfully to the anticipated conditions of her or his future life.

Kohn's research has focussed primarily on how social position influences habits of mind (e.g., flexibility and autonomy), and his discussion of parenting centers around modes of punishment, i.e., around the parent's use of coercive power. Since the parent's coercive power (e.g., greater physical strength, control over allowance and privileges, and even control over expressions of love and affection for the child) can readily be applied to the parent's coorientation objectives (Ritchie, 1987), Kohn's theoretical position can be extended to family communication patterns.

The parent who regards conformity to authority as an important or necessary social habit will be more likely to apply his power to exact overt compliance, and the child will be likely to respond by promoting her parent's congruency — even at the expense of blocking her parent's accuracy. Conversely, the parent who regards independence and autonomy as important or necessary social habits will be more likely to restrain his exercise of power and encourage the child to explore and express her own views about various topics — even at the expense of accepting a lower level of congruency. The first kind of objective implies that the parent is more likely to assert his power over the child in a rather blunt and straightforward way; the second kind of objective implies that the parent is likely to restrain his power in order to encourage the child to develop greater independence and self-confidence.

Interpreting the FCP Instrument: The Epistemic Relationship

In their retrospective assessment of FCP research, McLeod and Chaffee (1979: 24) complained of the scarcity of careful theoretical reasoning in the

field: "What results, at best, is yet another replication of our research rather than development of alternative measures and elaborated theory." At least part of the difficulty may lie with the tendency of researchers to adopt the conceptual interpretations of the instrument offered by its originators (e.g., in Chaffee and McLeod, 1970; McLeod and Chaffee, 1972), without re-examining the epistemic relationship between the actual content of the instrument and the concepts supposedly being measured.

In this section I will undertake such a re-examination, in order to show that the *content* of the FCP items is more consistent with a conformity vs. autonomy reading than with the traditional reading of the scales as a measure of harmony vs. confrontation. I will then show that the results of recent investigations are also more consistent with the conformity / autonomy view than with the traditional interpretation. Finally, I will show that an interpretation of the scales as measures of norms favoring conformity vs. autonomy is theoretically consistent with the findings of FCP-based research that have accumulated over the past two decades.

Socio-Orientation Items

1. "You'll know better when you grow up.'"
2. "Your parent's ideas are correct and you should not question them."
3. "A child should not argue with adults."
4. "There are some things in life that are either right or wrong."
5. "There are some things that just shouldn't be talked about."

Each of the first five socio-orientation items asserts the parent's power and denies the child's competence. The child is specifically prohibited from behavior that might lead to upward information flow and the parent's accuracy; a strong objective of the parent's congruency is implied. Items #4 and #5 also

suggest that considerable weight should be given to the authority of traditional beliefs, and that the individual should conform to the views of his or her primary social group.

6. "The best way to stay out of trouble is to keep away from it."

7. "You should give in on arguments rather than risk antagonizing others."

The last two items suggest that the child is expected to back down at the first sign of resistance. These two items are not quite so blatant in their assertion of the parent's power — but they do deny any expression of autonomy, power or knowledge to the child, and they explicitly encourage the child to adopt behavior that will promote the parent's congruency — i.e., to conform to the parent's views.

With regard to social harmony, the first five items strongly suggest that harmonious relationships within the family are to be achieved by means of the child always yielding to the adults. None of the arguments require any exercise of social skills such as empathy or sensitivity to the beliefs of others; in each case, social harmony is to be achieved through the simple expedient of giving in, backing down, and conforming to the opinions expressed by an authority figure or by a social majority.

Concept-Orientation Items

1. "The family talks about topics like politics or religion where some persons take different sides from others."

2. "Every member of the family should have some say in family decisions."

3. "The parents ask the child's opinion when the family is discussing something."

The first item implies an egalitarian ethic between adults — neither person asserts power and each recognizes the other's claim to be knowledgeable. The next two items also imply an egalitarian ethic, with explicit recognition of the child as a source of information and autonomous opinions. As with the first two items, the emphasis is on a free flow of information within the family, and congruency is de-emphasized. There is an implicit promise that parents will restrain their exercise of power in order to encourage the child's autonomy, and accept lower congruency in order to achieve greater accuracy.

4. "Kids know more about some things than adults do."

5. "Your parents encourage you to challenge their ideas and beliefs."

6. "Getting your ideas across is important, even if others don't like it."

7. "You should always look at both sides of an issue."

The final four concept-orientation items also imply recognition of the child as knowledgeable and encourage the child to pursue an objective of the parent's accuracy — even at the expense of the parent's congruency. Three of the final four items suggest a kind of verbal aggressiveness that might hinder the development of harmonious social relationships, but only #6 suggests a blatantly confrontational approach to communication. The final item encourages the child to pursue social harmony through explicit fair-mindedness and perspective-taking, and most of the items on the concept-orientation scale suggest a kind of mutual respect and tolerance for diversity that might logically be associated with tactful, overall harmonious relationships.

Socio-orientation and social harmony: an empirical test

As the foregoing analysis shows, the content of the fourteen FCP items can be readily interpreted as measures of an orientation toward conformity vs.

autonomy. Either orientation might lead to harmonious social relationships, but the nature of the harmony will be quite different. Social harmony resulting from socio-orientation is the harmony of acquiescence and, at best, an uneasy peace. The child pays the entire price of harmony by always giving in to authority — should the child refuse to give in on any issue whatsoever, the peace is shattered and the harmony is lost. Social harmony resulting from concept-orientation is the harmony of mutual respect and forebearance, and exists on a deeper, more permanent level; the price of harmony is shared by parent and child, and is less likely to be shattered by disagreement on any one issue.

Nothing in the socio-orientation items suggests that the child is expected to exercise autonomous intellectual or social judgment; to the contrary, the socio-orientation items suggest a basic mistrust in the ability of the child to think for himself, along with a fear that the child must be constrained from engaging in potentially divisive behaviors. The concept-oriented items, on the contrary, suggest that the child is regarded as fully capable of exercising sound judgment both with regard to intellectual content and with regard to social relationships.

Interpreting the FCP instrument as a measure of an orientation toward conformity vs. autonomy leads to predictions quite different from those that can be derived from the conventional interpretation. Meadowcroft (1986) has shown that the conventional interpretation leads to a prediction that socio-orientation will increase as the child matures. Consistent with the conventional interpretation, Meadowcroft characterizes the socio-oriented communication pattern as one that "stresses the importance of harmonious interpersonal relationships, encouraging children to behave in ways that

maximize harmony." From this description of socio-oriented communication, and based on Piaget's (1971) theory of the stages of cognitive development, Meadowcroft argues that, in order to comply with the demands of the socio-oriented family communication pattern,

> children are required to execute sophisticated perspective-taking skills associated only with the final stage of cognitive development (formal operations) in order to perform the task of maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships. Rather than simply being concerned with themselves and their own opinions and behaviors, children in socio-oriented communication families also must be concerned with how these factors might affect other people and take this into account in shaping their own behaviors (Meadowcroft, 1986: 605).

If socio-orientation implies that the parent is inclined to assert his power in order to secure his child's overt conformity, then socio-orientation leads to the opposite prediction. Precisely because younger children lack perspective-taking skills, parents might reasonably conclude that the younger child is incapable of either the social tactfulness implied by the concept-orientation items, or the kind of abstract reasoning that would render their contributions to family discussions worth considering. Because the child has not yet developed a level of intellectual maturity and social skill sufficient to operate as an autonomous individual, the parents are more likely to expect the child simply to conform to the parents' opinions. As children gain intellectual maturity, the parents are likely to perceive less need for the child's conformity, and are more likely to encourage the child to excercise her growing intellectual skills by engaging in a free and open exchange of ideas. Thus, if the scales are interpreted as measures of an orientation toward conformity vs. autonomy, Piaget's stage theory of development leads to the prediction that parents of younger children are more likely to encourage conformity (socio-orientation) and parents of older children are more likely to encourage independence and intellectual autonomy (concept-orientation).

Meadowcroft reports a strong and significantly negative correlation between socio-orientation and grade in school ($r = -.34$, $p < .01$), and a weak (non-significant) positive correlation between concept orientation and grade in school. These findings clearly contradict the conventional interpretation of the scales, as described by Meadowcroft, and by the same token are entirely consistent with the view that socio-orientation measures an orientation toward conformity and concept-orientation measures an orientation toward independence and intellectual autonomy.

CONFORMITY vs AUTONOMY: A MODEL OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION NORMS

Kohn's (1977) theory of the intergenerational transmission of values maintains that parents generalize from their own social experiences (for example, in the workplace) and express values consistent with the expectation that their child will face similar conditions. The "substantive complexity" of the parent's job (including how much the parent is required to communicate with other people and how much autonomy the parent exercises in making decisions about his or her work) is hypothesized to affect the parent's values for the child, in terms of conformity vs. autonomy. The parent's values for the child, in turn, affect the parent's discipline practises. As I have shown in the preceding, a strong case can be made for interpreting the family communication patterns instrument as a measure of orientation toward conformity or autonomy. In this section I will consider the implications of the conformity / autonomy distinction for communication norms in the family, and review some of the findings in previous research studies concerning the communication behaviors associated with each orientation.

One Dimension — Or Two?

If the child's conformity is pursued through exercise of parental power in support of the parent's congruency and the child's autonomy is pursued through restraint on parental power in support of the parent's accuracy, we might suppose on purely conceptual grounds that conformity and autonomy should be negatively related. However, they are not necessarily merely opposite values of a single conceptual dimension: the parent's power can be distinguished from the child's autonomy, and the demand that a child conform to the parent's views can be conceptually distinguished from the demand that a child take an active interest in ideas. At the very least, a parent might (passively) fail to exercise coercive power over the child's opinions without necessarily encouraging the child to develop any special degree of autonomy.

The coorientation model predicts a negative relationship between the two FCP dimensions — but the empirical evidence is mixed. Ritchie (1985), Good (1983), and Wade (1984) report significant negative correlations between socio-orientation and concept-orientation, but Meadowcroft (1986) found the two dimensions to be statistically uncorrelated, consistent with the previous literature, as summarized in McLeod and Chaffee, 1972. Nor is it possible to decide the matter conclusively on the basis of relationships to other variables. Many of the studies of family communication patterns have identified opposite relationships for the two scales — for example, if socio-orientation is positively related to some third variable, then concept-orientation tends to be negatively related (for reviews, see Chaffee and McLeod, 1970; Chaffee *et al*, 1972; McLeod and Chaffee, 1972). Significant interaction terms, when they have been observed, can usually be interpreted as

evidence of a curvilinear relationship between the dependent variable and an underlying dimension of conformity vs. autonomy.

For example, Chaffee *et al* (1966) report that the only significant difference in newspaper readership is between adults in a pluralistic family (low socio-orientation and high concept-orientation) and each of the other three types. This finding could be interpreted as an interaction effect (e.g., concept-orientation has its effects only at low levels of socio-orientation), but if socio-orientation is interpreted as measuring a positive norm in favor of hierarchical power relations and concept-orientation as measuring a positive norm against hierarchical power relations, then the "mixed" cells, consensual and laissez-faire, could be viewed as mid-ranges on a basically unidimensional scale, and the significant increase in newspaper readership among pluralistic families could be interpreted as evidence that newspaper readership is affected only at the extreme, when family norms strongly reject hierarchical power relations.

Given the inconclusiveness of the evidence, the history of studies in which the two scales have been observed to be independent, and the theoretical expectations that they should be negatively related, it is reasonable to regard them as two aspects of a single complex concept, and leave the question of their statistical independence to be decided by further research. I will discuss the two dimensions separately, noting where the research literature successfully differentiates between the two and where it does not.

Orientation toward conformity (Socio-Orientation)

According to Kohn's theory, parents with routine jobs, in which they must conform either to the standards of a work-group or to the dictates of a supervisor, and in which it is important to be able to follow orders promptly

and accurately, tend to expect that their children will face similar conditions when they enter the work force. Accordingly, they are likely to value conformity in their children, and will encourage their children to adopt a respectful attitude toward authority. Children socialized according to such values are taught not to "rock the boat," to attach little importance to ideas, and to distrust differences of opinion. They are taught to look to higher authority as a source of the "correct" opinions, and not to question these opinions.

Orientation toward Independence and Intellectual Autonomy (Concept-Orientation)

Parents with "substantively complex" jobs are required to consider many aspects of a situation and arrive at a decision. They often spend much of their work-time in communication activities, often exchanging ideas and opinions or negotiating differences with others. It is important for people in such jobs to be able to think clearly about issues, arrive at a logical conclusion, and defend that conclusion in a free give-and-take of ideas. Parents with such jobs are likely to assume that their children will face similar conditions in their own jobs, and accordingly value independent thinking and intellectual autonomy in their children. They will encourage their children to think for themselves, to develop the ability to state a position clearly and to defend it forcefully, and to engage in a free discussion of ideas, where multiple points of view are presented, and where it cannot be assumed beforehand that any one view is the correct one. In short, they will seek to encourage their children to develop sophisticated skills of discussion and argumentation.

Family Orientations toward Conformity vs. Autonomy: a review of past research

The family communication patterns instrument has been included in a variety of empirical studies over the years, and an impressive body of findings has accumulated. In the following pages, I will briefly review a few of the more salient findings from the FCP literature. In every case, the findings are entirely consistent with Kohn's model of parental values as based on a generalization from the parent's life-experiences, and as a motivation for socializing the child according to the parent's experiences of what constitutes successful behavior.

Information flow within the dyad

Ward and Wackman (1968) induced either socio- or concept-orientation in one member of a dyad, then measured the subject's communication behavior using the Bales (1950) system. "As predicted, those in the socio-orientation conditions showed more solidarity and self-disparagement, and complied more with the assertions of the confederate. Those in the concept-orientation condition asked for and gave more orientational and evaluative statements, and more frequently disagreed with the confederate" (reported in McLeod and Chaffee, 1972). Compliance with the other person's assertions, self-disparagement and solidarity with the social group are all attributes associated with conformity. Asking questions, making evaluative statements, and asserting one's own views in disagreement with the other are all attributes associated with independence and intellectual autonomy.

Persuasibility

According to research cited by McLeod and Chaffee (1972), socio-oriented children are generally more susceptible to influence from outside sources, and tend to focus more on the source than on the content of the message. Concept-

oriented children are less easily persuaded, and tend to focus more on informational cues in the message, including the number and quality of arguments and the expertise of the source. For the socio-oriented child, the most important question is whether the message comes from an authority, and the automatic response to a message is to accept it (i.e., to conform). For the concept-oriented child, the most important question is whether the message is backed up by competent reasoning, and the automatic response to a message is to question and evaluate — that is, to adopt a stance of independence and intellectual autonomy.

Political Participation

Concept-oriented children and adults report more interest in politics, more knowledge of political issues, a higher level of political campaign activity, and more discussion of politics with their friends than socio-oriented respondents (McLeod et al., 1967). Politics, in a pluralistic society, involves a free exchange of ideas, in which the individual must be able to give careful consideration to opposing views, and also to state her own position clearly and defend it forcefully — exactly the capabilities that would be encouraged by a parent wishing to develop traits of independence and autonomy. Since pluralisic politics often assume that there is no one "right" answer, the conformity-oriented child will find little to which he can cling for comfort and security.

Similarly, since politics may be regarded as the art of compromise, conformist children, raised with the ideal that "there is one right answer and all the other answers are wrong" will tend to be suspicious and disdainful of politicians, while children raised to ideals of a free exchange of ideas will tend to admire the dialectical skills of a good politician. As would be

predicted by this line of reasoning, McLeod and his colleagues report that concept-oriented children are more likely than socio-oriented children to express admiration of a politician.

Conflict and conflict resolution

If socio-orientation measures norms favoring "taking the role of the other" and seeking interpersonal harmony, we would expect that socio-oriented persons would display particular talents at resolving conflict. If socio-orientation measures norms favoring conformity to authority or acquiescence to power, we would expect that socio-oriented persons would be discomfited and incapacitated by conflict. Conversely, if concept-orientation measures norms favoring confrontation and disharmony, we would expect that concept-oriented persons would react to conflict with a kind of "go-it-alone" rejection of the situation, but if concept-orientation measures norms favoring an active exchange of ideas, then we would expect that concept-oriented persons would react to conflict by attempting to reason with their opponent and arrive at a mutually-acceptable and rational solution.

McLeod et al. (1967) set up a hypothetical situation in which the subject (1) likes a neighbor, (2) favors a certain neighborhood improvement program, and (3) learns that the neighbor has been expressing opposition to the program. This situation was described to adult subjects, who were then asked how likely is that they would respond to the situation by engaging in each of ten communication-related behaviors. For most of the response categories, socio- and concept-orientation had opposite consequences. Adults who had been raised in a concept-oriented family were more likely, and socio-oriented adults less likely to "ask him why he feels that way" or "tell him why he's wrong." Adults who had been raised in a socio-oriented family were more likely, and concept-

oriented adults less likely to apply social power — "get others to support my view," "find an authority to decide," or to react with anger and hostility — "feel upset about it," "feel angry at the neighbor," or "avoid talking with him."

Thus it appears that concept-orientation predisposes people to a free flow of information — to ask and give opinions and reactions freely, and to accept disagreement as part of the natural order of things. Socio-orientation, on the other hand, predisposes people to a restricted flow of information, a flow of information and opinion which is strongly conditioned by power and authority. The concept-oriented person displays sophisticated perspective-taking skills in the face of conflict, and the socio-oriented person reacts to conflict by confronting the opponent with pressures to conform, by appealing either to a "higher authority" or to a social majority.

For most of the response categories, "consensual" subjects (high on both dimensions) gave responses that averaged between the extremes of "pluralistic" (high concept, low socio) and "protective" (low concept, high socio) subjects. However, the "mixed types" exceeded the "unidimensional types" on two variables. Consensual adults were more likely than either purely socio-oriented or purely concept oriented adults to "ignore the criticism." Laissez-faire subjects (low on both dimensions) on the other hand, were most likely to "forget the entire project," and least likely to engage in any form of communication about the issue; these findings give some support to the interpretation of the scales as measures of independent concepts.

Summary

These findings suggest that the concept-oriented child is socialized to engage in an open flow of information, to evaluate messages critically and to

develop and assert an autonomous "point of view." They seek and use more information from outside the family, are more critical and evaluative of information, and show more tolerance for diversity. The socio-oriented child is socialized to conform to the views of their parents and other authority figures. They are less likely to seek information and more likely to avoid conflicting information that might contradict their received opinions. They accept persuasion more readily (especially from an authoritative source), avoid open confrontation in a conflict situation, and shun the give-and-take of political argumentation.

DISCUSSION

Chaffee and McLeod's work in family communication patterns originated in an attempt to measure the structure of power relations in the family, and its influence on political socialization. When they discovered two separate (and apparently statistically independent) dimensions of family communication norms, they shifted their attention away from power, and focussed instead on an interpretation based on Newcomb's coorientation model. As their work progressed, they shifted to a more elaborate version of coorientation, in which the key elements are not orientations toward an object but cognitions about the object — and about the other person's cognitions. The full implications of this shift in focus, however, were not realized in their interpretation of the FCP construct, with the consequence that certain inconsistencies crept into the FCP literature — inconsistencies that continue to hamper the effort to extend and consolidate a theory of family communication patterns.

I have shown that the items most frequently used in the socio-orientation scale support an interpretation in terms of Gecas' (1981) and Kohn's (1977)

distinction between socialization norms favoring autonomy and independence *vs* conformity. Furthermore, I have suggested that these two dimensions can be viewed as two separate (but not necessarily independent) aspects of the family power structure — thus returning full circle to Chaffee and McLeod's original conceptualization. What has previously been labelled "socio-orientation" can be interpreted as a tendency to apply parental power to compel the child's conformity — to the opinions of the parent, other authority figures, or the family's social reference group. What has previously been labelled "concept-orientation" can be interpreted as an orientation toward restraining the parent's power in order to encourage the child's independence and intellectual autonomy. These interpretations are entirely consistent with Meadowcroft's (1986) finding that socio-orientation is negatively, and concept-orientation positively correlated with the child's year in school. They are also consistent with McLeod and Chaffee's (1972) finding that socio-orientation is negatively, and concept-orientation positively correlated with the parent's social class.

The interpretation based on conformity *vs* autonomy provides a single unifying theme for interpreting the results of past research on family communication patterns, and leads to rigorous (and testable) theoretical predictions about communication norms and behaviors. The relationship between the two dimensions and the age of the child suggests a possible theoretical link between cognitive views of socialization (see Meadowcroft's 1986 discussion of Piaget) and social-psychological views of socialization; the relationship between the two dimensions and the social class of the parents suggests further linkages to Kohn's (1977) theory of the inter-generational transmission of values.

EPILOGUE: TOWARD IMPROVED MEASURES

My primary concern in this study has been to consolidate and elaborate the theoretical underpinnings of the Family Communication Pattern construct, first through further elaboration on the underlying coorientation model and second through reinterpreting the FCP instrument as a measure of two closely-related dimensions of parental power (in keeping, incidentally, with Chaffee and McLeod's original objectives), that is, an emphasis on encouraging their child to conform to parental views *vs* encouraging their child to develop and express independent and autonomous views. At the same time, I have begun the project of developing an alternative instrument for measuring Family Communication Patterns.

In my initial attempt, I have developed (through a combination of *a priori* reasoning and interviews with college and high-school students) a set of questions designed to measure the subject's impression of the degree to which his or her parents expressed norms favoring: (1) the parent's congruency; (2) the child's congruency; (3) the parent's accuracy; and (4) the child's accuracy, as well as (5) the parent's open expression of power in the family and (6) the parent's encouragement of tactful and harmonious social relations within the family (see Appendix B). Preliminary to a planned field-test in a sample of junior-high and high-school students, I have pre-tested these items by administering them, in parallel with the fourteen FCP items shown in Appendix A, to a "sample of convenience" drawn from college classes in Communication Arts.

Although the sample used in the pre-test is non-representative, the preliminary results are somewhat interesting. The composite socio-orientation scale was found to be strongly and negatively correlated with the composite

concept-orientation scale (r = -.39). In keeping with the argument presented in the foregoing, the scale measuring the degree to which the offspring perceives his or her parent as wielding power within the family is negatively related to concept-orientation (r = -.21) and positively related to socio-orientation (r = .32). The scale measuring the degree to which the offspring perceives communicative relationships within the family as marked by harmony and mutual tact, however, was strongly and positively related to concept-orientation (r = .57) and *negatively* related to socio-orientation (r = -.36).

Other relationships observed in the pre-test results are also consistent with theoretical expectations: in particular, norms favoring parent's accuracy are strongly and negatively correlated with norms favoring the parent's congruency. A similar, although weaker, relationship holds between norms favoring the child's accuracy and norms favoring the child's congruency. The relationship between accuracy and congruency norms and the family communication pattern scales are also strong, and in the theoretically-predicted direction (accuracy norms are positively related to concept-orientation and negatively related to socio-orientation; congruency norms are negatively related to concept-orientation and positively related to concept-orientation).

Given the limitations of a pretest situation — an unrepresentative "sample of convenience," and testing on young adults who have lived away from home, in some cases for several years rather than on adolescents, these findings cannot be regarded as in any way conclusive. However, they do support the theoretical expectations, and they do suggest that the constructs of concept-orientation and socio-orientation may indeed measure two aspects of a single underlying concept.

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Appendix A
FCP Items

Socio-Orientation Items

1. "You'll know better when you grow up.'"
2. "Your parent's ideas are correct and you should not question them."
3. "A child should not argue with adults."
4. "There are some things in life that are either right or wrong."
5. "There are some things that just shouldn't be talked about."
6. "The best way to stay out of trouble is to keep away from it."
7. "You should give in on arguments rather than risk antagonizing others."

Concept-Orientation Items

1. "The family talks about topics like politics or religion where some persons take different sides from others."
2. "Every member of the family should have some say in family decisions."
3. "The parents ask the child's opinion when the family is discussing something."
4. "Kids know more about some things than adults do."
5. "Your parents encourage you to challenge their ideas and beliefs."
6. "Getting your ideas across is important, even if others don't like it."
7. "You should always look at both sides of an issue."

APPENDIX B
Information Flow Measures

(Amount of Communication):

He and I do not talk enough.
I do not feel I can talk with him about anything important.
He and I often have long, relaxed conversations.
Anytime I want to talk about something, he's available.

(Communication Tone):

I think he really enjoys talking with me.
I really enjoy talking with him.
I often feel nervous when I talk to him.
I often feel that he is putting me down.

(Orientation toward Parent's Accuracy):

I usually feel completely free to tell him my ideas.
He encourages me to express my opinions openly.
I can talk to him about almost anything.
There are a lot of things I would never tell him.
He asks me what I think about it.
He tries to understand exactly what I think.
He encourages me to express my feelings openly.
He tries to understand my ideas.

(Orientation toward Parent's Congruency):

I would be surprised if he admitted that I am right.
If I think he'll get mad about something I try not to tell him.
If he doesn't approve of it he doesn't want to know about it.
He prefers that we express only positive feelings.
Whether I'm feeling good or bad I try to be open about it.
He becomes impatient with my views if they are different from his.
He often admits that he's wrong.

(Orientation toward Child's Accuracy):

He often tells me about things that he does.
He always tells me about plans that affect the entire family.
He tends to be very open about his emotions.
He does not express affection openly.
He does not discuss personal relationships.
He tries to help me understand his reasoning.
He explains exactly how he thinks.

(Orientation toward Child's Congruency):

There a lot of things I'd rather not know about.
I want to know what is going on even if it is upsetting.
I often think he keeps things from me.
If he's mad at me I don't want to know about it.
I generally don't want to hear about bad feelings.

(Orientation toward Harmony):

We usually look for a compromise to which we can both agree.
He often admits that I am right.
I often admit that he is right.
He tries to be tactful.
I try to be tactful.

(Parent's exercise of power):

He expects me to obey him without question.
When I'm at home I'm expected to obey Dad's rules.
In our home, he usually has the last word.
He wants me to take action consistent with his views.
He insists that he's the boss.